

## Introduction: Vivir bien/Buen vivir and post-neoliberal development paths in Latin America: scope, strategies, and the realities of implementation

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## Introduction

# *Vivir bien/Buen vivir* and Post-Neoliberal Development Paths in Latin America

## Scope, Strategies, and the Realities of Implementation

by

*Kepa Artaraz, Melania Calestani, and Mei L. Trueba*

Neoliberalism has economic, political, sociocultural, and environmental consequences that are known to cause imbalances across the globe (Navarro, 2020). The financial crisis that began in 2008 in the economic centers of the Global North has been steadily spreading to low- and middle-income countries, including much of Latin America. Political leaders around the world are unable to confront the contradictions of market-led forms of development that deepen socioeconomic inequalities while unsustainably extracting the natural resources required to maintain consumption-driven forms of economic growth. At the same time, economic growth appears to be the prerequisite for responding to immediate local needs and bringing social groups and entire countries out of poverty. Awareness of and resistance to the structural inconsistencies of the neoliberal globalization project at the margins, led by people from countries at the so-called periphery of the world system, had already emerged in the crisis of the 1980s (Wallerstein, 1984). This was a resistance that sometimes emerged from civil society rather than being led by traditional political and economic elites (Petrás, 2011).

Having survived the lost decade of the 1980s and beyond, Latin America perfectly illustrates the crisis of legitimacy of the neoliberal revolution and the sociopolitical counterrevolution of civil-society-led alternatives. It is in this context that we are witnessing innovative ideas emerge from communities and subjects that have historically been economically, politically, and culturally marginalized. Latin America's upheaval and contestation have their roots in indigenous epistemologies—epistemologies of the South (Santos, 2015)—and practices. Where indigenous groups have become a newly empowered political subject (Postero, 2006), as in Bolivia, the repercussions

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of these political transitions include the incorporation of indigenous knowledge and practices into the roadmap for alternative, “refounded” (Artaraz, 2012) versions of these societies. As a result, both Bolivia and Ecuador have seen the introduction of indigenous concepts of *vivir bien* (living well) or *buen vivir* (good living) into their constitutions, national development plans, and public policies. When the concept of *vivir bien* was added to these constitutions, possibilities were opened for countries around the region to experiment with the meaning of *sumak kawsay*/*buen vivir* and *suma qamaña*/*vivir bien* and the ways in which a range of understandings of these terms could be translated into policy (Asamblea Constituyente, 2008). Versions of the concept have also gained salience in other Latin American countries, from Venezuela to Nicaragua.

“*Vivir bien*” is here understood as a catch-all concept for multiple terms with intricate meanings and policy “translations.” Reflecting this diversity of meanings, some contributions to this issue refer to this concept as “*buen vivir*” or “*vivir bien*” while others use the indigenous terms *sumak kawsay* or *suma qamaña*. The important point is that concepts of the “good life” belonging to alternative epistemic traditions have become central drivers in policy processes designed to radically transform these societies and address people’s everyday struggles. However, the multiple variants of *vivir bien* or the struggle for hegemonic control of their meaning (Geddes, 2014) may also be the source of conflict between groups. Sometimes the policy translation of *buen vivir* has been led by governmental institutions. The national development plans of Bolivia (2006–2019) and Ecuador (2007–2017) push this concept front and center and consider the implications for areas such as the delivery of welfare, the pursuit of alternative models of development, and the introduction of citizenship rights. The importance of *suma qamaña* has been defended by indigenous communities and political movements in their search for recognition of alternative ways of living. Increasingly, an international community of nongovernmental organizations, activists, and academics has taken an interest in exploring the implications of *buen vivir* and the processes of policy transformation and debate in the region and beyond. One key issue that remains to be explored is whether state-sponsored forms of developmentalist modernization can be reconciled with traditional indigenous values.

This issue reflects the interest sparked by an international group of academics. There was a degree of urgency, given our awareness that the era of left-leaning governments in the region that had inspired hope more than a decade ago was coming to an end, to be replaced by new populisms and politics gleefully undoing the human development progress achieved in the past 10 years. The response received has delivered an understanding of *vivir bien* that is more complex, subtle, and thought-provoking than expected and has unpacked the deeply contested scenarios and problems arising when alternative models of development are implemented.

## BUEN VIVIR: A DISCURSIVE AND POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

Various writers have attempted to define “*buen vivir*,” and some have suggested that it may be difficult to provide a single definition. Therefore, the

realities of the implementation of this concept can be expected to be challenging from the outset. It has been argued that the concept rose to prominence as a critique of classical development (Gudynas, 2011) and that it may provide the key to an alternative paradigm to capitalism (Villalba, 2013). Altmann (2014), however, describes the influence of the German international cooperation enterprise the Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit on the spread of this concept through a series of events and publications across Latin America since 2000. He emphasizes the linkage of the contents of this political concept to the rise of indigenous movements since the beginning of the 1980s and the contribution of intellectuals in Bolivia (e.g., Javier Medina and Simón Yampara) and Ecuador (e.g., Carlos Viteri and Alberto Acosta) to its international diffusion. As Gudynas (2011) emphasizes, *buen vivir* is “a concept under construction” that has unfolded in a wide variety of ways in a variety of contexts.

In the first article of this issue, titled “*Buen vivir* (Good Living): A ‘Glocal’ Genealogy of a Latin American Utopia for the World,” Adrián Beling, Ana Patricia Cubillo-Guevara, Julien Vanhulst, and Antonio Luis Hidalgo-Capitán offer a historical overview of the development of the concept in Latin America. Reconstructing contemporary discourses on *buen vivir*, they argue that *buen vivir* emerged in the early twenty-first century in the midst of debates and contestation about dominant development models. They go on to explore *buen vivir* as an example of what they call a “glocal” discursive articulation—a concept reflecting both local and global considerations with variants that can be traced to particular sets of actors and debates.

Beling and colleagues explore the origins of the concept and its relevance to broader debates in the international arena about the social, economic, and political transitions brought about by developmental and ecological concerns. The mainstream characterization of *buen vivir* is built on the idea of harmony with nature (with a nod to the idea of sustainability) and with those around us—in an argument reminiscent of the equality-driven pursuit of distributive justice. They move the debate forward by adopting a form of critical discourse analysis to help them locate some of the key historical periods and actors in the articulation of *buen vivir*. This method of analysis requires outlining a series of context-forming factors that explain how the discursive process was able to highlight *buen vivir* at propitious moments, among them global debates about ecological sustainability, the global political efforts that have, since the Río conference in 1992, become a search for solutions to the civilizational challenge presented by climate change, the global struggle for recognition of cultural difference and indigenous rights, and the awakening of modern collective forms of political action by social movements. These forms of political action found favor during the global financial crisis of 2008 and the critiques of the dominant neoliberal model that accompanied them.

At the regional level, Beling and colleagues point to associated moments such as the debates about historical memory and recognition during the official celebrations of the five hundredth anniversary of the “discovery of America” and the creation of broad-based social movements that led to the formation of the Movimiento al Socialismo in Bolivia and the Alianza PAIS in Ecuador and the turn to the left of many Latin American governments that commentators at the time called the “pink tide.” It is in this context that they explore the influence

of key writers such as the Ecuadorian Carlos Viteri, the Bolivian Javier Medina, and the Peruvian Grimaldo Rengifo, who, with the support in some cases of international nongovernmental organizations, have brought notions of *buen vivir* into a wider public sphere and influenced both the indigenous movements and the political platforms that emerged in Bolivia and Ecuador.

The constituent process that led to the new Ecuadorian and Bolivian constitutions had a dual effect. On the one hand, the two constitutions have become global references on *vivir bien*, and the term is used in their accompanying development plans as a measure of the extent to which those countries are pursuing the political and development direction enshrined in it. On the other hand, the materialization of *vivir bien* in those constitutions has produced a global upsurge of academic and political interest around the world. What has followed since 2010 is an explosion of academic literature on the subject, explaining and critiquing the debates between governments and movements demanding policies, rights, and forms of governance that live up to the alleged ideals contained in the concept of *buen vivir*. This issue and the publishing track records of some of its contributors are part of this process. Beling and colleagues identify three current dominant discursive strands of *vivir bien*: the indigenist, operating from the ground and searching for links with other similarly defined indigenous notions in other parts of the world such as *ubuntu* in Africa, the neo-Marxist discourses that, from the outside, seek in *buen vivir* a latent critique of modern capitalism, and the ecological post-developmental critique that has, they argue, provided the greatest contribution to other global debates about profound social, economic, and environmental ecological transformation. Their article provides a comprehensive framework for analysis that can help us situate the contributions of the others.

### MAKING SENSE OF BUEN VIVIR

In “What Is *Sumak Kawsay*? A Qualitative Study in the Ecuadorian Amazon,” Carmen Amelia Coral-Guerrero, Fernando García-Quero, and Jorge Guardiola tackle the thorny issue of what “*buen vivir*” means. They go beyond the conceptual translations or interpretations of “*buen vivir*” in the policy documentation and development plans of the various countries discussed in this issue to discuss the results of an ethnographic study they conducted with indigenous communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon. They highlight four key constituents of *buen vivir*. The first is a particular view of nature and of the place of humans in nature that chimes with much of the literature on the subject. Their data-rich description of the ways in which the residents of the communities they studied understand the principle of harmonious relationship between humans and Mother Earth reveals it to be a symbiotic relationship. Beyond the obvious link between care for the environment and community well-being, they point to the connections between this view of nature and people’s identity and culture. The implications of this for the idea of rights to effective control of their territories have been spelled out by others in this issue (see, e.g., Merino’s contribution) and are recognized in the International Labor Organization’s Convention 169.

The second constituent is the special place in this worldview of the community, which finds expression in a number of areas of social life, some more formalized than others, including forms of mutual aid that reinforce social interdependence such as the care of children and the collective work that delivers community benefits through ties of reciprocity. Rather than being quaint expressions of a traditional way of life, these collective forms have real-world benefits in well-being and reflect a view of human nature that is diametrically opposed to the individuality of Western societies. Indeed, the ethics of care considers interdependence the basis for moral action (Tronto, 2005).

The third constituent of *buen vivir*, built from the principle of interdependence, is an economy based on solidarity and community life, in which harmonious relations with nature are extended to the rest of the community for the common good. The fourth is respect for ancestral knowledge, “the feeling, thinking, and doing of life,” and, in particular, knowledge of health and natural medicine. This is a theme also visited by other contributors to this issue, including Alejandra Carreño-Calderón for the Aymara people of northern Chile and Andrea Bravo Díaz for the Waorani nation in Ecuador.

In “*Sumak Kawsay* Is Harmful for All of Us’: Oil Roads and Well-being among the Waorani in Ecuadorian Amazonia,” Andrea Bravo Díaz discusses the merits of living well and considers the policy context of *buen vivir* in Ecuador. Focusing on understanding the Waorani *waponi kewemonipa* (living well), she makes a rich contribution to this question from an anthropological perspective. For the Waorani, living well has to do with peace, collective happiness, and certain ecological experiences. The forest contributes to the Waorani’s understanding and practice of living well, and national economic development policies and the oil industry challenge its health and vitality. Thus, the stage is set for a discussion of the conflicts and contradictions that exist between a particular indigenous way of life and conception of living well that successive governments of Ecuador since Correa have claimed to defend and protect and the national developmental goals that clash with them. Bravo Díaz points in particular to the negative effects of living along oil roads for the Waorani people. The failure of the Ecuadorian state to address the social and ecological damage to indigenous peoples brought about by the dominant model of development is a theme that we return to at various points in this issue.

## VIVIR BIEN AS A POLITICAL INSTRUMENT

“Living Well and Health Practices among Aymara People in Northern Chile,” by Alejandra Carreño-Calderón, and “*Küme mongen* on the Coast: Contexts and Course Changes of Intercultural Health in the South of Chile,” by Natalia Picaroni Sobrado, Sebastián Medina Gay, and José Osvaldo Vásquez Reyes, explore traditional forms of health and healing knowledge. The demands for recognition of indigenous peoples have been accompanied by the demand for cognitive justice—the idea that different forms of knowledge exist and have the right to enter into dialogue (Santos, 2007; Visvanathan, 1997). These contributions are important in framing issues of health and access to care in countries that have adopted neoliberal policies, such as Chile, with increasing socioeconomic



and health inequalities for vulnerable and poorer groups of the population (Gideon, 2014). The two articles point to the idea of the introduction of *vivir bien* notions into health policy as a potential solution to long-existing health governance challenges.

Carreño-Calderón explores the implications of the concept of *vivir bien* for the indigenous people themselves—specifically, regarding the way in which they incorporate *vivir bien* into their health practices. She describes the emergence of this concept in debates regarding the implementation of the Special Program for Health and Indigenous Peoples created in the aftermath of the Pinochet dictatorship ostensibly to redress inequalities in health indicators between indigenous and nonindigenous people. She draws attention to the critique that this government program of so-called intercultural health serves the nefarious purpose of depoliticization of Aymara communities and their grievances with the Chilean state (Mignone et al., 2007). For her, the implementation of intercultural health seeks to reduce health to a biomedical minimum and endorses a neoliberal system of health-care provision. She refreshingly describes the repertoire of strategies adopted by the different local indigenous associations for challenging state efforts to incorporate indigenous health programs into a neoliberal framework. She shows how *vivir bien* is being used to put forward a holistic understanding of health and as a tool for political action that incorporates historical, cultural, and territorial demands. This political use of the concept for pursuing social rights is echoed in many of the other articles in this issue, especially those of Merino on territorial governance and Alderman and Restrepo and Orosz on housing and education, respectively.

The article by Picaroni Sobrado and colleagues is also based on an ethnographic exploration, this one on the design and implementation of two health-care projects by Williche organizations. It explores Chile's intercultural health framework and the policy context in which projects conceptualizing good health as *küme mongen* (health, good life) operate. Similarities with the previous article abound, among them the discussion of the subtle ways in which state-sponsored policy underlies "a will to objectify, to box in, to enclose, to paralyze that ultimately makes any cultural confrontation impossible." This leads to a division of indigenous groups between the *indio permitido* who has passed the test of acceptance of modernity and the recalcitrant insubordinate. For Picaroni Sobrado and colleagues the government's policy space belies a biomedical hegemony while at the same time proposing the introduction of alternative voices in health management such as those reflected in *küme mongen*. This generates possibilities for a series of contradictory constructions of health that emphasize social, collective, and cultural understandings. According to the authors, these understandings are a response to neoliberal-driven environmental degradation, the state's efforts to co-opt indigenous health care into its own framework, and the response of indigenous communities that has delivered alternative forms of health-care provision and identity reinvigoration.

These two articles demonstrate the effect of employing critical terms such as *vivir bien*, *küme mongen*, and intercultural health to impose a power regime designed to subvert their intent. This realization supports Beling et al.'s caution in this issue against the assumption that the greatest challenge is the search for a way of operationalizing *vivir bien* as policy when the reality is that we are

referring to epistemic realities that make that dialogue difficult or impossible. Other contributions have mapped the direct effect of operationalizing some of the conceptual principles of *vivir bien* in different policy areas with significant implications for well-being.

## VIVIR BIEN AS THE SITE OF CONTESTATION OF INDIGENOUS AND CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS

Jonathan Alderman's "The Houses That Evo Built: Autonomy, *Vivir bien*, and *Viviendas* in Bolivia" and Ricardo Restrepo Echavarría and Agnes Orosz's "*Buen vivir* and Changes in Education in Ecuador, 2006–2016" explore key pillars of welfare regimes: housing and education. Along with health, these are core areas of welfare provision that carry important responsibilities for nation-states. Meeting these fundamental human needs through the design and implementation of contextually and culturally appropriate services would represent a great achievement in the pursuit of social justice (Fraser, 1997). The pursuit of these policies, however, is not without its difficulties and challenges. Alderman explores the ubiquity of *vivir bien* in the political discourse of the Movimiento al Socialismo government in Bolivia since the election of Evo Morales in December 2005. He analyzes the implementation of a housing program in the municipality of Charazani—a public policy process that reveals complex power relations between the state, the municipalities, and the recipient families that are negotiated through a changing conception of *vivir bien*. He shows that the state dictates a type of housing that lives up to its own ideas of its responsibilities toward its citizens and uses these houses as leverage in a political process designed to foster centralizing political forces. This represents a nation-state-building project involving the approval of a new constitution that emphasizes indigenous autonomies. On the ground, the imposition of brick houses creates tensions between tradition and modernity for recipients whose conception of *vivir bien* in the *ayllu* is bound up with adobe houses. Alderman vividly describes the different conceptions of *vivir bien* in play—the modern welfarist position of the state versus a notion of harmonious life in the community. He also considers the process by which families who receive these houses, in their new condition of citizens, are able to redefine *vivir bien* in terms of a traditional conception of reciprocity in the *ayllu*, this time directed toward the state.

Restrepo and Orosz explore the right to education that was included in Ecuador's 2008 Constitution as a pillar of *buen vivir*. They describe the changes in the country's legal framework for education as a response to the social debt generated during the neoliberal period, when the rapid increase in poverty and socioeconomic inequality had significant consequences for the quality and reach of education. They explore the most salient aspects of the educational system as it developed between 2006 and 2016 and discuss the conceptualization of *buen vivir* that those changes represented—conceptions of education as a right, as a social debt, and as the driver of a more just, knowledge-intensive, and clean economy. They point to significant increases in the resources devoted to the state educational system and in the inclusion of marginalized communities. They also discuss education in relation to the wider transformations required for the



country to design a new inclusive and green economy for the future and a polity characterized by greater citizen participation. The key lesson is that the power of the state can be put to work in the construction of *buen vivir*. There are, however, significant caveats and reservations. Interculturalism and decolonization are found wanting, especially with regard to the virtually nonexistent education in indigenous languages and to intercultural dialogue and the systematic effort of power elites to roll back some of the earlier achievements in building citizenship. Their assessment of education policy suggests that *buen vivir* itself may be in peril unless nation-states can produce, through an adequate educational system, the critical citizens who can bring this idea to reality.

On the relationship between citizens and the state, Roger Merino's "*Buen vivir* and the Making of Indigenous Territories in the Peruvian Amazon" is a good example of critical engagement with the state. He refers to a "politics of *buen vivir*"—the use of the concept by indigenous peoples as basis for a political strategy in their pursuit of self-determination, territoriality, and governance of natural resources. This is a political process that requires acknowledgment of the power of the state and its attempts to impose a dominant view of identity, development, and land management. Merino shows how the state's dominant conceptualizations clash with those put forward by indigenous communities. Where the government prioritizes integration (read "assimilation"), indigenous communities aim to exercise self-determination. Where the state considers development in terms of extractive activities leading to economic growth, indigenous communities think about the spiritual significance of their territories and the cultural reproduction possibilities that they afford them. Where the government thinks about the economic value of land under a system of ownership based on individual land titles, indigenous communities think about territory in terms of meaning and collective ownership and management. Merino ultimately demonstrates that the formal legal framework is a double-edged sword that allows for political emancipation but is incapable of understanding indigenous territorial rationality.

In response, according to Merino, indigenous communities have clung to the concept of "integral territory" as a way of overcoming the limitations of collective property and to the claim that they are not merely ethnic communities with property entitlements but nations with territorial rights. This claim for recognition contains the biggest challenge yet for the territorial governance of the nation-state. The politics of *buen vivir* provides an alternative epistemic paradigm that cannot be easily resolved within the existing legal framework. The perspective being put forward by indigenous communities has the potential to reshape territorial governance and transform Peru into a plurinational state. Merino warns, however, against hasty celebration by reminding the reader of the relatively minor achievements that recognition of plurinationality in Bolivia and Ecuador have delivered for their indigenous communities.

A common theme seems to emerge from the contributions to this issue: tethered to different epistemic paradigms, conceptualizations of *buen vivir* often complicate dialogue between the state and indigenous communities. This argument is in many respects not dissimilar to the ones put forward by Picaroni Sobrado and colleagues and by Carreño-Calderón with regard to the health policies in Chile that are culturally relevant to various indigenous communities.

A number of papers consider the implications of national settings in which the state manages to control the messaging and the epistemic positioning on *vivir bien* in a context that confronts local, often indigenous communities with representatives of the state or the corporations conducting extractive activities. Few contributions, however, have carried out a dispassionate analysis of *vivir bien* in the terms in which it is proposed by the state. One exception is Patricio Carpio Benalcázar and Francisco Javier Ullán de la Rosa's "The *Buen vivir* Postdevelopmentalist Paradigm under Ecuador's Citizens' Revolution Governments (2007–2017): An Appraisal" systematically explores the transformations that have informed Ecuadorian politics and development in the time period described. The authors reach a very straightforward conclusion about the limited nature of these transformations, which they describe as "a capitalist neo-developmental scheme with some social-welfare policies of a social-democratic nature." Given the evidence they present, it is difficult to argue against this judgment. Beyond that, they begin to outline a convincing explanation for the limited reach of *buen vivir* in Ecuadorian society in terms of the entryism of economic elites, the political co-optation of popular leaders into the state-sponsored fold of *buen vivir*, and political overreach, especially by a hyperpresidential Correa.

This contribution combines a number of themes in this issue—both indigenous rights and participation and the construction of alternative models of development. One other contribution makes a parallel argument: "Consultation in Ecuador: Institutional Fragility and Participation in National Extractive Policy," by Diana Vela-Almeida and Nataly Torres. They analyze five lawsuits in Ecuador brought by local communities claiming that their legal rights to consultation and informed prior consent have been violated. This is particularly important in challenging major extractive projects. The authors skillfully incorporate a contextual element of *buen vivir* agendas—popular participation and consultation—into their analysis. They also suggest that bureaucratic obstacles, conflicts of interest, and political pressure all challenge democratic practice and the constitutional commitment to *buen vivir* in Ecuador. In particular, they emphasize the country's institutional fragility, which they identify as the biggest risk for the defense of territories and the fulfillment of *buen vivir*.

## THE RIGHTS OF NATURE AND THE PREVAILING DEVELOPMENT MODELS

In "Challenges for the Implementation of the Rights of Nature: Ecuador and Bolivia as the First Instances of an Expanding Movement," María Valeria Berros takes a detailed look at one of the most significant elements of the legal frameworks developed in both Bolivia and Ecuador in the context of the new constitutions approved in 2008 and 2009 respectively. The recognition of the rights of Mother Earth or Pachamama was directly connected with debates about the meaning and underlying philosophy of *vivir bien* and the extension of these to a global legal and academic audience, no doubt facilitated by Bolivia's success in placing these debates on the United Nations' agenda. Very soon, the neo-Marxist discourses identified by Beling and colleagues in

this issue were building a global case against modern capitalism on some of the main tenets of *buen vivir* (Farah and Vasapollo, 2011).

Berros tracks some of those experiences. The Yasuní-ITT project in Ecuador represented a creative approach to preventing the oil reserves in the Ecuadorian Amazon from being exploited.<sup>1</sup> The Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory case in Bolivia was a challenge by indigenous people to the construction of a road through their territory, arguing that they had not provided informed consent as required by the constitution and ILO Convention 169, ratified by Bolivia in 1991. Similar legal challenges in Mexico and in Brazil have been built on the arguments related to the rights of nature. Berros identifies a number of challenges faced by socio-legal research, the most important of which is the construction of the international legal and institutional architecture that can reflect widely different positions of different countries on environmental law. She is optimistic about the possibility of dialogues across cultures and approaches but argues that the question of the rights of nature has implications for the way in which nature is managed and made to perform economically. The debate leads directly to development and its shape and form (see Walsh, 2010). There is a growing literature on political ecology and environmental economics that employs empirical evidence from Latin America for the very good reason that the conflict between the rights of nature and neo-extractivist development policies is most salient there (Burchardt and Dietz, 2014). The following contributions to the issue contribute to this body of research with their critical exploration of the policy implications of new development paradigms and *buen vivir* in Ecuador.

Hugo Goeury's "Rafael Correa's Decade in Power (2007–2017): Citizens' Revolution, *Sumak Kawsay*, and Neo-Extractivism in Ecuador" explores the Correa government's attempt to implement some understanding of *sumak kawsay* in line with the new constitution that was supposed to signal a new beginning for the country. Goeury follows in detail the development of the constitutional project and the inclusion in the final text of *sumak kawsay* as the guiding principle for a new development paradigm. The Yasuní-ITT initiative is presented as a bold international attempt to live up to the ideals of *sumak kawsay*. Although the initiative failed—according to Goeury because of low international and investor interest—there was a distinct change in the direction of economic policy; neo-extractivism became the hallmark of development policy for the rest of Correa's presidency.

Not all contributors to this issue agree with the dominant view of a contradiction between discourses on *vivir bien* and their translation into a new developmental model. In "*Buen vivir* as an Alternative Development Model: Ecuador's Bumpy Road toward a Postextraactivist Society," Jorge Enrique Forero explores the Correa government's attempts to overcome the country's economic dependence on extractive activities by introducing a replacement based on a knowledge-intensive economic sector. He acknowledges the difficulties in producing this new developmental model but attributes the main responsibility for the limited progress made to Ecuador's peripheral position in the hierarchy of global capitalism.

Karolien van Teijlingen and Consuelo Fernández-Salvador concentrate on discourse, exploring the role of state agencies in redefining *buen vivir*. In "*¿La*

*minería para el buen vivir?* Large-scale Mining, Citizenship, and Development in Correa's Ecuador" they claim that state institutions articulated buen vivir in ways that supported top-down government neo-extractivist development agendas in exchange for redistribution of the taxed surplus stemming from those economic activities. In contrast, Goeury's article concentrates on the political explanation for this change in economic direction and the discursive transition that accompanied it. In particular, he argues that this change can partly be explained by Correa's particular anticorporatist position and the "delegative democracy" that his government advanced over the years. According to this view, the state became the sole legitimate representative of "the people" and the sole guarantor of the common good, a position that excluded and delegitimized any partisan positions on development, including those that Correa referred to as "childish indigenism."

Van Teijlingen and Fernández-Salvador explore the transformative potential of buen vivir by interrogating its developmental operationalization in Ecuador's growing large-scale mining sector. For this they draw on ethnographic fieldwork with communities directly affected by the country's first large-scale mining project, the Chinese-owned Mirador copper mine, where they were able to conduct in-depth interviews and examine community responses to the mining development. They describe the workings of Ecuador Estratégico, a government agency created to interpret and implement buen vivir in relation to economic development and particularly to natural-resource extraction. They point to the space occupied in its discourse by buen vivir (happiness and well-being) and to the legitimizing role it plays in trying to convince the affected communities of the virtues of large-scale mining. Here, as throughout the issue, the political use of buen vivir is stressed.

Van Teijlingen and Fernández-Salvador provide a witness-level analysis of the state-sponsored reformulation of buen vivir in ways that justify the perpetuation of extractivist economic models. The conclusions they reach corroborate the findings of many contributions to this issue, in particular those of Beling and colleagues and Berros. One of the ways in which these activities gain legitimacy is by the assignment of some of the tax proceeds they generate to improving the lives of communities. Again, this parallels arguments developed in other articles, particularly Alderman's and Restrepo and Orosz's. Significantly, however, van Teijlingen and Fernández-Salvador explore the process of discourse creation by state institutions that operate to generate a hegemonic view of buen vivir that justifies the continuation of mining. They show that local communities are often divided with regard to mining, especially where it affects them directly in terms of the loss of land or pollution. One clear consequence of Ecuador Estratégico's operations is the raised expectations of redistribution among people living near large-scale mining projects like Mirador—expectations that future governments will do well to attend to. The communities most resistant to government attempts to redefine buen vivir from above as a strategy for the expansion of large-scale mining are finding new voices, methods of communication, and resistance practices that are redefining their relationship to the state and the terms of their citizenship responsibilities. One of these strategies is all-out resistance—articulating alternative views of development.

## CONCLUSIONS

In assembling this issue, we aimed to introduce readers to the complexity of the issues emerging from conceptual or practical engagement with *vivir bien*. On the one side, we wanted to reflect upon *vivir bien*'s contested meanings and the varying ways in which it feeds into alternative ways of living, including multiple understandings of well-being. On the other, we wanted to explore its potential as an alternative model of development. The various contributors critically explore its practical implications, illustrating some of its strengths and its limitations and pitfalls. Equally important, through their empirical contributions they highlight some of the shortcomings of top-down neoliberal development models disguised as *vivir bien*. Beling and colleagues, who examine the discursive variations of *buen vivir* in relation to specific periods and political actors, consider it incomparable to Western understandings of well-being and models of development and question the possibility of constructing policies that truly reflect the principles of *buen vivir* and have significant transformative potential:

From an international policy-sphere perspective, *buen vivir* is often fetishized as a monolithic, exotic, and romantic—if not hopelessly naïve—approach that is vaguely related to welfare, perhaps with a multicultural or ethnic hype, the main challenge being how to operationalize it in (ideally, quantifiable and) generalizable indicators. The purpose of this article has been to dispute both of these notions. On the one hand, it shows that *buen vivir* is neither a neo-ethnodevelopmental discourse pouring indigenous worldviews into the global public sphere nor a lineal one analogous to any quantifiable Western conception of well-being that can be seamlessly assimilated into existing bureaucratic structures and rationalities.

Whether this is at all possible and to what extent remains to be determined by political actors in the region and beyond. One thing is clear: as the contributions to this issue emphasize, the concept of *vivir bien* is an open field of contestation inhabited by multiple actors—indigenous communities, state institutions, and international policy and academic organizations. The transformation of *vivir bien*/*buen vivir* into policy is likely to show vestigial signs of those discourses and provide a rich source of insights into wider debates about forms of being well and doing well with others.

## NOTE

1. Launched in 2007 by President Correa, the Yasuní-ITT initiative sought to keep a billion barrels of oil in the ground under the Yasuní National Park in exchange for payments of US\$3.6 billion from the international community. The initiative was scrapped in 2013.

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